

Project Venture

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Program developers or their agents provided the Model Program information below.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Project Venture (PV) is an outdoor experiential youth development program designed for high-risk American Indian youth and youth from other ethnic groups. NREPP has reviewed evaluations of surveys conducted with middle school youth.

Project Venture aims to prevent substance use and related problems through:

- Classroom-based problem-solving activities
- Outdoor experiential activities
- Adventure camps and treks
- Community-oriented service learning

The program relies on American Indian traditional values to help youth develop positive self-concept, effective social interaction skills, a community service ethic, internal locus of control, and increased decisionmaking and problem-solving skills.

PROGRAM BACKGROUND

The National Indian Youth Leadership Project developed Project Venture in 1990, with funding from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP), and other private and public funders. The program has operated without interruption since that time, serving more than 3,000 American Indian youth and youth with other ethnic backgrounds. PV has been replicated in 30 communities in Alaska, Arizona, California, Hawaii, Idaho, Louisiana, Montana, New Mexico, North Carolina, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

From 1995 to 1998, Project Venture participated in the CSAP-sponsored National Cross-Site Evaluation of High Risk Youth Programs. Since 1998, local private and public funders have supported Project Venture.



RECOGNITION

MODEL PROGRAM

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

MODEL PROGRAM

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice

IOM CLASSIFICATION

UNIVERSAL

Project Venture has been widely implemented among the general middle school population. Referrals are solicited for youth at higher risk for substance use and other developmental problems as long as a balance is maintained between moderate- to high-risk youth. Project Venture has been implemented with higher-risk youth in juvenile justice and mental health settings; however, the impact on this group has not been studied systematically.

INTERVENTION TYPE

COMMUNITY-BASED

Typically, the community-based organization takes the lead, working out arrangements to implement activities in weekly sessions at participating schools. Theoretically, a school can operate PV, although this configuration has never been tested. Students are recruited from classroom groups for the after-school, weekend, and summer activities.

CONTENT FOCUS

SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE, DOES NOT SPECIFICALLY ADDRESS SUBSTANCES

SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE

Social and emotional competence are developed through experiential activities that encourage critical thinking, problem solving and increasing levels of risk that challenge youth to develop inter- and intrapersonal skills, thereby enhancing resiliency.

DOES NOT SPECIFICALLY ADDRESS ANY SUBSTANCES

Project Venture utilizes an indirect, youth development approach to prevent substance use and related problems. In keeping with traditional American Indian values, staff engage youth in positive, alternative-to-use activities, including hiking, camping, rock climbing and rappelling, water sports, and community service learning projects, avoiding any stigma associated with substance abuse programs. Project Venture is marketed to youth as a fun, positive, challenging program with no mention of substance abuse.

Parent involvement as an adjunct strategy:

Project Venture encourages parents to attend all community-based sessions.

INTERVENTIONS BY DOMAIN

INDIVIDUAL, SCHOOL, PEER, FAMILY, COMMUNITY

INDIVIDUAL

Classroom curricula designed to motivate pro-health decisions and skill use; community service; culturally appropriate activities, curricula incorporating cultural heritage lessons along with culturally appropriate activities; life/social skills training

SCHOOL

Classroom-based skills development; life skills training with role-play

PEER

Alternative/recreational activities; involving youth in alternative/recreational activities

FAMILY

Parent education

COMMUNITY

Mentoring combined with community service and drug education; multiagency activities and collaboration

KEY PROGRAM APPROACHES/COMPONENTS

ALTERNATIVE/RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES; COMMUNITY SERVICE; CULTURAL DYNAMICS; IN/AFTER-SCHOOL CURRICULA; PEER LEADERSHIP, COUNSELING OR SUPPORT; SCHOOL/COMMUNITY COLLABORATION; SKILL DEVELOPMENT

ALTERNATIVE/RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Project Venture includes alternative-to-substance-use activities in its community-based activities. While these activities may appear to be merely recreational (for example, hiking, bicycling, camping, etc.), they are designed to challenge participants to develop positive problem-solving skills, self-concept as a capable young person, and effective social interaction skills, skills that will combat substance use.

The out-of-school/community-based component includes more active adventure-based experiential activities designed to challenge youth to develop skills and competencies that support a positive sense of self and of one's place in and responsibility toward others.

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Part of the community-based component includes the planning and implementation of a number of community service learning projects in order to develop service leadership qualities and an ethic of service. Projects progress through a continuum, from simple adult-planned projects such as trash pick-ups and visits to a senior center, to complex youth-planned activities such as weekly visits to a free meals kitchen to plan menus, deliver services, and interact with the regular clients. Other projects include conducting a school-wide needs assessment followed by planning and conducting playground beautification using Navajo rug designs.

CULTURAL DYNAMICS

The program relies on American Indian traditional values to help youth develop positive self-concept, effective social interaction skills, a community service ethic, internal locus of control, and increased decisionmaking and problem-solving skills.

IN/AFTER-SCHOOL CURRICULA

Project Venture includes an in-school component of about 20 weekly sessions spread throughout the school year. These include carefully constructed games and initiatives that start with socialization activities, progress to trust and team-building, and on to more complex problem solving. This component also includes community service projects, a weeklong camp, and other extended wilderness treks.

PEER LEADERSHIP, COUNSELING OR SUPPORT

Project Venture identifies older teens to serve as service staff to assist with younger middle school participants. Service staff often are previous Project Venture participants. These older youth play an important leadership role in after-school and summer activities, especially the camp and other wilderness experiences.

SCHOOL/COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

Project Venture was developed and is run by the National Indian Youth Leadership Project, a community-based organization. The in-school component represents an important collaboration between NIYLP and the local schools and provides youth with opportunities otherwise unavailable through the schools.

SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Project Venture is aimed at developing personal skills such as internal locus of control, decisionmaking/problem solving, and judgment. It is also aimed at the development of interpersonal skills such as teamwork, cooperation, respect, and trust.

HOW IT WORKS

Typically, PV consists of about 20 hourly sessions delivered during the school day over the course of a school year, during which youth engage in experiential games and initiatives facilitated by a PV staff member. Classroom teachers are encouraged to participate.

Through these classroom-based sessions a smaller number of youth are recruited and enrolled to participate in the community-based activities that include increasingly challenging outdoor experiential activities such as team- and trust-building, hiking, bicycling, climbing, and rappelling. These activities are designed to be more than merely recreational, as staff work with youth to plan, implement, and debrief in specific ways that use the experiences as life metaphors.

The community-based component also includes four service-learning projects per year designed to facilitate servant leadership. School vacations and summer breaks include a weeklong camp and/or wilderness trek for participants. Older high school-aged peers are selected and trained as service staff to provide year-round older peer role models within the community-based components. Approximately 150 hours of community-based activities are provided throughout the year.

In addition, four potluck dinners or other family/community events such as “family fun days” are conducted throughout the year. PV youth facilitate a portion of the activities, providing opportunities for parents to see their children as capable and skilled.

IMPLEMENTATION ESSENTIALS

Project Venture is a relatively complex model, so an initial orientation session between the developer and the potential replication site (on- or offsite, or by phone) is recommended to determine the site’s readiness and capacity. NIYLP can provide guidance regarding staffing, connecting with schools, and related issues.

Other requirements for successful implementation include:

- A minimum of 2 days of onsite training, or training at the Annual Project Venture Gathering Workshop, for direct service staff and key support and administrative staff. This training is not for administrators only; it is important that staff who will actually deliver services to youth attend the training.
- Purchase of Replication Guide and other recommended materials (see optional materials in Cost Section below).
- Quarterly contact (minimum) with the developer during the first year and semiannual contact in subsequent years regarding implementation and evaluation.
- An implementation plan that can be supported by local budget.
- A formal agreement with participating schools to ensure support, including active participation by teachers in project classrooms.
- Use of community/cultural resources to guide program implementation.
- Access to recreational space and equipment.
- Staff-to-youth ratio of about 1:25 in classroom component and 1:7–15 in community-based component, in addition to teachers (in school) and service staff (community-based).

OUTCOMES

DECREASES IN SUBSTANCE USE, REDUCTIONS IN NEGATIVE ATTITUDES/BEHAVIORS, IMPROVEMENTS IN POSITIVE ATTITUDES/BEHAVIORS, OTHER TYPES OF OUTCOMES

DECREASES IN SUBSTANCE USE

The National Study of High Risk Youth (Sambrano & Springer, SAMHSA/CSAP, 2002) found PV participants had significantly reduced:

- Lifetime tobacco use
- Frequency of tobacco use
- Frequency of inhalant use
- Lifetime alcohol use

Subsequent studies demonstrate, compared to control group, consistent program impact on delaying onset of and/or reducing current use of alcohol, marijuana, tobacco, and other drugs, including:

- Reductions in past 30-day alcohol and illegal drug use

REDUCTIONS IN NEGATIVE ATTITUDES/BEHAVIORS

- Decreased depression
- Decreased aggressive behavior

IMPROVEMENTS IN POSITIVE ATTITUDES/BEHAVIORS

- Improved internal locus of control
- Increased resiliency
- Improved school attendance

OTHER TYPES OF OUTCOMES

- Reductions in peer drug use

EVALUATION DESIGN

CSAP's study of High-Risk Youth Programs included a repeated measures design with groups randomly assigned to treatment and control. Baseline, post, 12-, and 18-month followup assessments were administered using the National Youth Survey (Springer et al.) and selected items from the Nowicki–Strickland Locus of Control Scale. Subsequent studies have included baseline and posttest measures of program and matched comparison youth.

DELIVERY SPECIFICATIONS

25–52 WEEKS

Typically, youth are enrolled in Project Venture for 1 year, although some replications have enrolled youth for 2 and 3 years throughout the middle school grades. Some may continue in subsequent years as service staff if they show leadership abilities. The classroom-based component includes about 20 hourly sessions spread across the school year.

Youth enrolled in the out-of-school/community component typically attend one after-school session per week for 2 to 3 hours and one daylong weekend/vacation-time activity per month for a total of approximately 150 hours per year. Four community service-learning projects per year are recommended as well as four potluck dinners or other suitable family events. The leadership camp experience (usually in the summer) should be at least 7 days in length.

INTENDED SETTING

RURAL, TRIBAL RESERVATIONS

Project Venture was developed for youth in rural areas but has been adapted to urban and suburban settings by replication sites. Several tribal reservations have implemented Project Venture.

FIDELITY

Components that must be included to achieve the same outcomes cited by the developer:

- In-school classroom sessions devoted to team-building and problem-solving activities
- Community-based/out-of-school experiential/adventure-based activities
- Community-service learning projects
- Summer camp and other wilderness experiences such as backpacking trips.
- Older peer service staff who serve as mentors to program youth and assistants to professional staff.
- Parent/family involvement in community-based activities and potluck dinners

Optional components or strategies, and how they were determined to be optional:

- Note: While the in-school component is not optional, it is difficult for some sites to implement especially in the first year if school relationships are not yet established. We strongly recommend this component as a tool for recruitment and orientation to the program and as a way to reach more youth. In many school settings, the experiential approaches used with students provide an alternative model for teachers to interact with students.

A comprehensive fidelity instrument for Project Venture is available through the National Indian Youth Leadership Project and is included in the Project Venture Replication Guide. A process evaluation instrument, designed as a quick checklist of key elements for staff planning and debriefing activities, also is available from the same sources.

BARRIERS AND PROBLEMS

Barriers associated with in-school component include:

Problem: Obtaining support and “buy-in” from school administration, including identifying a suitable classroom and cooperating teacher for implementation.

Possible Solutions:

- Develop a relationship with school during proposal writing, if appropriate.
- Develop relationships with administration (top-down) as well as with interested classroom teachers (bottom-up), especially health and physical education teachers.
- Provide orientations, project activity demonstrations, and evidence-based program research information to school boards, school administrators, teachers, and students.

Problem: Identifying qualified staff with “soft” (ability to interact effectively with adolescents) and “hard” (recreational, physical, low and high ropes technical skills) skills.

Possible Solutions:

- Consult with developer for examples of staff qualifications. Be clear about qualifications in job postings.
- Staff must possess “soft” skills—the ability to interact effectively with adolescents: these are the most critical. “Hard” or technical skills can be taught or provided by contractors, especially in the early stages of implementation.

Problem: Funders as well as school and community members may not understand the “indirect” youth development approach to substance abuse prevention and related problems.

Possible Solution:

- Provide evaluation research data regarding the efficacy of this model. Cite other positive youth development approaches such as Boys and Girls Clubs of America, mentoring, and Search Institute information. Developer can provide additional information on request.
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PERSONNEL

FULL-TIME, PART-TIME, PAID, VOLUNTEER

The developer recommends at least one full-time coordinator who also delivers direct services to youth. Since the community-based activities take place during after-school hours, part-time staff work well, though need to be available enough to establish regular contact with youth. Community cultural “experts” and elders may be contracted, paid stipends, or volunteer. Individuals or organizations with technical/hard skills may be contracted as needed. High school-aged service staff are generally paid a stipend for school year and summer activities.

Typical staffing issues encountered by users when implementing this Model Program, and potential solutions:

It is sometimes difficult to find staff with both “soft” and “hard” skills. Staff with specialized technical skills and experience may require relatively high salaries. It can also be difficult to find staff from the local culture/tribe who possess the minimal qualifications. While the developer seeks candidates with bachelor’s degrees, this requirement may be waived in exchange for experience and cultural knowledge.

EDUCATION

HIGH SCHOOL, UNDERGRADUATE, GRADUATE, SPECIAL CERTIFICATION, SPECIAL SKILLS

Service staff are high school students.

Developer recommends an undergraduate degree for staff or equivalent experience working with youth in experiential, assets-based, indirect approaches.

Special skills may include technical outdoor adventure skills, first aid, and CPR skills. These skills can be acquired over the course of the first year, using contractors for highly skilled activities until staff are adequately trained. Remember, the “soft” or interpersonal skills with adolescents are the most critical and the hardest to train.

PERSONNEL TRAINING

Type: SEMINARS/WORKSHOPS

Location: ONSITE (OF USER), OFFSITE (AT DEVELOPER'S OR TRAINER'S LOCATION)

Length: BASIC, REFRESHER REQUIRED

The NIYLP requires a pre-startup orientation meeting with replication site staff, which may be held by telephone conference or in person. The NIYLP also requires a basic 2-day training workshop onsite or at the annual national Project Venture Gathering, which is usually offered during the summer NIYLP National Camp in New Mexico. Replication staff are also welcome to attend the PV Gathering each year as a refresher. Technical assistance can be arranged onsite with developer and through phone and e-mail support. New sites may not purchase the Replication Guide without also contracting for training. It is our desire that each program site be very successful and that all programming be safe and effective for participants. To this end, we insist that all sites receive training from experienced Project Venture staff during their first year of operation. In subsequent years, NIYLP will host at least one yearly gathering of replication sites to enhance skills, share new resources and materials, and nurture a sense of community among replication sites.

Additional skills needed for successful implementation vary but may include the following which can be acquired through local vendors/trainers:

- Basic First Aid and Wilderness First Aid
- CPR
- Challenge Course facilitation
- Facilitating games and initiatives for team building, trust building, problem solving

COST (ESTIMATED IN U.S. DOLLARS)

\$100,000+

Cost considerations for implementing this program as recommended by the developer:

Costs depend on number of youth to be served. NIYLP finds that a budget of approximately \$100,000 per year is needed to serve 100 youth in the in-school component, 30 youth in the community-based component, and summer camp and wilderness experiences.

BUDGET COSTS:

Budgets will vary widely based on local organizational contexts and funding source. A typical \$100,000 budget at NIYLP for Project Venture includes the following line items:

Personnel	\$50,000
Travel.	\$7,000
Supplies/incentives	\$4,000
Equipment	\$7,000
Evaluation.	\$10,000
Camp	\$5,000

Facilitator stipends	\$1,000
Training	\$3,000
Audit	\$1,000
Operational	\$7,000
Other Indirect costs	\$5,000

TRAINING COSTS:

Estimated Training Costs for Year 1 of a Project Venture Replication/Adaptation:

Replication Guide	\$ 250
Mandatory pre-startup meeting	(free if by phone, otherwise \$500 plus expenses)
Mandatory 2-day basic program training	\$2,500 (+ travel/lodging)
Summer camp training (recommended, not required)	\$2,500 (+ travel/lodging)
Followup onsite visit upon request	\$1,500 (+ travel/lodging)
Training from local providers (First Aid/CPR, Challenge Course, etc.) to be determined locally.	

MATERIALS COSTS: (LIST ALL AVAILABLE PRODUCTS)

Required materials:

Project Venture Replication Guide	\$250 (Can be duplicated with permission.)
AEE Accreditation Standards Manual	\$25
(Purchase from the Association for Experiential Education; may not be duplicated.)	

OPTIONAL MATERIALS:

Camp and Service Learning Videos	\$50
(Purchase from NIYLP; may not be duplicated)	
Games and initiatives books	\$200
(Purchase from publisher's list provided by NIYLP. May not be duplicated)	
Activity kits	\$1,200–\$3,000
(Purchase from producer's list provided by NIYLP. May not be duplicated.)	
Includes equipment to implement a variety of problem solving games and activities.)	

INTENDED AGE GROUP

CHILDHOOD (5–11), EARLY ADOLESCENT (12–14)

Project Venture was designed for early adolescents in grades five through nine. It has been implemented with youth as young as fourth grade and in grades 10 through 12, but has not been systematically studied with these populations.

INTENDED POPULATION

AMERICAN INDIAN/ALASKA NATIVE, HISPANIC/LATINO, NATIVE HAWAIIAN AND OTHER PACIFIC ISLANDER

Project Venture was designed for and tested in American Indian school and community settings (approximately 75 percent American Indian) in rural and low socioeconomic areas. It has been replicated in rural Hispanic/Latino, Native Hawaiian, and Alaska Native settings, and in urban American Indian settings. It can be adapted for all cultural/ethnic and socioeconomic groups.

GENDER FOCUS

BOTH GENDERS

REPLICATIONS

IKE ALA PONO

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Ike Ala Pono is a Project Venture replication on the island of Hawaii funded through a State Incentive Grant (SIG). Currently in its third year, Ike Ala Pono does not have a formal in-school component, but engages youth in a wide variety of outdoor adventure-based activities, many of which incorporate traditions and values from the diverse local populations. This project has full-time and part-time staff. Summer “rite of passage” camp includes a challenge course, kayaking, Hawaiian hula chants, and other activities derived from the local landscape and cultures.

REPLICATION SETTING

The program is delivered in the rural North Kohala region of the big island of Hawaii.

REPLICATION SITE

Ike Ala Pono is administered by Family Support Services of West Hawaii, a social service agency, through a subgrant to an informal community group.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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REPLICATIONS

CHEROKEE CHALLENGE

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Cherokee Challenge replicates Project Venture and has been an outdoor after-school program for 20 years. The Program has received the North Carolina SIG Grant, Office of Juvenile Justice Tribal Youth Program Grant, and North Carolina Governor's Pass-Through Grant. The program offers year-round activities for individuals through adventure-based programming, cultural and educational programs, and environmental programming (water samples, insects, and soil erosion testing) in collaboration with the State's stream restoration project.

The Cherokee Challenge has peer leaders that work with the younger youth, serve as co-leaders during the school year, and, starting in 2004, work as service staff for the Youth Leadership Camp. Cherokee Challenge began working with sixth-grade students and, in 2004-2005, will work in the Tribal School's after-school program using PV adventure-based programming and curriculum. The goal of the Cherokee Challenge is to help youth continue a healthy substance-free lifestyle, gain employable skills, and respect self, others, and the community in which they live.

REPLICATION SETTING

Cherokee, NC, an urban area.

REPLICATION SITE

Cherokee Center for Family Services, a social service agency, in Cherokee, NC.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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ADAPTATIONS

CONNECTING TO COURAGE

NATURE OF THE ADAPTATION

Connecting to Courage (C2C) is a Project Venture adaptation that provides services to primarily Hispanic/Latino youth through in-school programming and out-of-school challenge and service activities. C2C is in its fifth year, and places high emphasis on parental participation and family involvement; provides comprehensive academic support for participants; and has developed a unique recruiting strategy. Changes were made to the program because interviews with school officials and local community surveys suggested the inclusion of activities to promote parental involvement at the school. Academic support is readily offered to youth because the organization that delivers the C2C program is an institution of higher education.

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

At the beginning of the program, the recruitment strategy includes recruiting parents and other supportive adults as admissions criteria for youth participation. Parent/youth workshops are offered and focus on increasing effective communication skills while creating opportunities for youth and parents to communicate about important and sometimes difficult topics. Experiential activities and service projects are used to encourage youth/adults to experience sharing common goals while practicing team problem solving and decisionmaking. Programmatically, an emphasis is placed on family fun and quality time for the youth and the parent one-on-one. Eight workshop 2.5 hours to 8 hours each are scheduled during the school year and C2C has consistently seen 75–90 percent parental participation in workshops.

Academic support includes tutoring and college preparation for youth and families; other support mechanisms include financial aid and strategic planning.

Outcomes that appear to be directly related to these experiences include:

- Significant increase in perception of parent disapproval of drug experimentation, particularly among male youth participants. ($p < .05$)
- Increase in the perception among youth participants, that it is “wrong” for peers to try alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.
- Significant improvement in academic achievement among youth participants.
- Significant increase in nonparent adult support of youth. ($p < .05$)
- Increase in perception of support from adults.
- Parents involved in program reported increase in family bonding.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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CONTACT INFORMATION

ABOUT THE DEVELOPER

Project Venture was developed by the National Indian Youth Leadership Project (NIYLP), an American Indian-owned and -operated, community-based, nonprofit organization with nearly 20 years of experience in youth development. NIYLP has conducted summer youth leadership camps since 1986, from which grew the year-round Project Venture model. In 1990, NIYLP received its first SAMHSA/CSAP grant to implement Project Venture. The program has operated continuously since that time in Native and other communities, regionally, and nationally, with nearly 30 implementations in 11 States.

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